Kentucky Early Childhood Professional Development Framework

Recommendations for Expansion to Include Technical Assistance Services

April 2008

The Kentucky Early Childhood Professional Development Framework: Recommendations for Expansion to Include Technical Assistance Services

April 2008

The Kentucky Early Childhood (EC) Professional Development (PD) Framework Plan (Townley & Newberry, 2002) was approved by the Early Childhood Development Authority, May 2002, and revised May 2003. Copies of the approved plan are available at www.kidsnow.gov.

This recommendations included in this report were developed through the Technical Assistance Work Group convened through the Division for Child Care.
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The proposed revisions to the Kentucky EC PD Framework were submitted to and approved by the Early Childhood Development Authority in April 2008.

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Executive Summary

Current research in the area of professional development provides evidence of the importance of targeted technical assistance in the work environment to promote the implementation of high quality practices[1]. This research also calls attention to the link between the education of early care, intervention and education providers and quality programs[2]. Based on these findings, recommendations have been made related to expanding the Early Childhood (EC) Professional Development (PD) Framework (2003) to address three critical elements.

Recommendation 1

Include in the Early Childhood Professional Development Framework a definition of professional development and description of the major components of professional development that support the implementation of effective early care, intervention and education practices.

The following definition of professional development is proposed for Kentucky: *Professional development includes structured teaching and learning experiences that support the acquisition of knowledge and skills and the implementation of knowledge and skills in the work environment. Professional development is an ongoing process of continuous improvement that increases job-related knowledge and skills, and is intentional and purposeful to support specific outcomes related to practice.*

High quality professional development experiences should be designed to lead to:

- ♦ all early care, intervention and education staff being competent, confident, highly qualified and able to implement practices consistently and with a high degree of fidelity;
- ♦ consistency in the use of high quality practice and programming across the state;
- ♦ continuous quality improvement, with staff who are able to manage change and effectively use available resources;
- ♦ high quality services to children and families; and
- ♦ measurable improvements in outcomes for children.

Recommendation 2

Include in the Early Childhood Professional Development Framework a definition of training and a description of the key characteristics of training that is designed to support the implementation of effective early care, intervention and education practices.

The proposed definition of education and training is: ***Structured learning experiences designed to help the learner gain knowledge and/or skills that will increase the implementation of high quality practices.***

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[1] Joyce & Showers, 2002

[2] Early, Bryant, Pianta, Clifford, Burchinal, Ritchie, Howes, & Barbarin, 2006; Howes, 1997; Phillips, Mekos, & Scarr, 2000; Panzano, Seffrin, Chaney-Jones, Roth, Crane-Ross, & Massatti (2002); Whitebook, Howes, & Phillips, 1989

A number of approaches can be used including (but may not be limited to): training sessions offered at workshops, conferences, institutes; formal coursework; independent studies; distance education such as webinars, online modules, conference calls, web-based courses/modules, web-based meetings; study groups; and communities of practice/learning (networking).

Quality training is:

♦ Based on needs assessment of what potential participants value and need to improve services;

♦ Matched to the learner's previous knowledge base and experience;

♦ Culturally sensitive;

♦ Focused on achievement-based outcomes or what participants expect to happen as a result of the training; and

♦ Designed to involve the use of evidence-based practice and recommended standards in both content and approach.

Recommendation 3

Add a section to the Early Childhood Professional Development Framework that defines technical assistance (TA) and provides a description of key characteristics of technical assistance and support that leads to the implementation of effective early care, intervention and education practices in the work environment.

The proposed definition of TA is: A collaborative, relationship-based model of assistance and support designed to 1) identify, select, or design evidence-based solutions to address problems, needs, or goals; 2) adopt or adapt knowledge to practice; and 3) effectively implement solutions customized to meet the needs of the client.

Numerous approaches can be used for providing TA and support, such as sharing information and resources, modeling, mentoring, coaching, structured consultation, communities of practice/learners and internships. In addition, a variety of delivery methods that can be used to provide TA, such as telephone, e-mail, discussion boards, fax, video-conferencing, and program visits.

Those providing TA and support need specific skills in order to implement TA effectively. The skills and competencies can be organized into three major areas.

1. Ability to establish and maintain a relationship with the client.
2. Content knowledge expertise.
3. Skills to implement effective technical assistance practices.

The level and intensity of TA can vary from low (brief encounters) to high (intense on-site support over time). The intent of all TA should be to provide support to staff in effectively implementing a practice or set of practices.

It is also critical to evaluate technical assistance. In doing so, three key components of the evaluation process should be addressed. These include a focus on:

♦ Four critical levels of evaluation: a) TA recipient's reactions; b) TA recipient's learning; c) TA recipient's change in behavior; and d) determination of the results/impact of the TA;

♦ TA provider self-reflection to support continuous quality improvement; and

♦ Establishment of a link to the client/TA recipient goals and outcomes.

Kentucky Early Childhood Professional Development Framework
Recommendations for Expansion to Include Technical Assistance (TA) Services

Introduction

The following document provides recommendations related to expanding the Early Childhood (EC) Professional Development (PD) Framework (2003) to include three new critical elements:

♦ A definition for and key elements of professional development that includes two specific components, training and technical assistance;
♦ Information on the distinctions between training and technical assistance services; and
♦ Key competencies for providers of technical assistance.

Background and Context

In the field of early care, intervention and education, efforts have been made to recognize the links between training and technical assistance (TA) efforts. This is based on the recognition that changes in practice require focused attention to both knowledge acquisition, as well as knowledge utilization, otherwise referred to as Training Transfer (Foxon, 1993). Research in the area of professional development has provided evidence of the importance of providing targeted technical assistance and support to the learner in his/her work environment as a way to help support appropriate implementation of high quality practices (Table 1; Joyce & Showers, 2002).

Table 1. Relationship between staff development and outcomes.

Components	Knowledge	Skill	Use of skills in work environment
Study of Theory	10 %	5%	0%
Direct Observation of a Skill	30%	20%	0%
Practice under simulated conditions	60%	60%	5%
Targeted TA in Work Environment	95%	95%	95%

* Joyce and Showers (2002) *Student Achievement through Staff Development*. ASCD: USA.

Other critical research findings suggest that education of early care, intervention and education providers is predictive of quality programs (Early, Bryant, Pianta, Clifford, Burchinal, Ritchie, Howes, & Barbarin, 2006; Howes, 1997; Phillips, Mekos, & Scarr, 2000; Panzano, Seffrin, Chaney-Jones, Roth, Crane-Ross, & Massatti (2002); Whitebook, Howes, & Phillips, 1989).

Specifically:

- Early care, intervention and education professionals who complete more years of formal training or who receive an early childhood degree at the university level provide higher quality care and education.
- Having a bachelor's degree and specialized early childhood training is the most desired educational level for making a difference in the quality of programs.
- Teacher preparation programs are more effective than informal workshops and/or taking college courses outside of a formal program.

Building on this research base is the promising evidence about the role of technical assistance and support (e.g., coaching, mentoring, consultation, etc.) in the implementation of high quality practices in early care, intervention and education settings. Specifically:

- Structured guidance and practice is needed to achieve the most comprehension and implementation of a practice (Corcoran & Goertz, 1995)
- Implementation of a new practice is positively related to having a system in place for monitoring implementation progress and access to TA (McCormick, Steckler, & McLeroy, 1995; Panzano, Seffrin, Chaney-Jones, Roth, Crane-Ross, Massatti, 2002).
- The most critical time for access to TA is during initial implementation of a practice, which leads to the most positive results (McCormick, et al., 1995; Panzano et al., 2002).

Rationale for Proposed Additions

The development and implementation of the EC PD Framework in Kentucky has provided leverage for extensive changes in the way that training is provided across the state (Rous, Grove & Townley, 2007). Based on the recommendations included in the PD Framework, the provision of education and training has changed significantly to support higher quality services. Given the research described above, the next logical step in the evolution of the PD Framework is the addition of guidance to support consistent implementation of technical assistance services across the state. There were several considerations identified by the work group that served as context for the recommendations proposed in this document.

First, there currently are differences among agencies in how technical assistance and support services are provided, even when the target audience of the services may be the same. This target audience includes direct care providers, directors and administrators, and whole agencies and organizations across public preschool, early intervention programs, child care, and Head Start programs. In addition, training and support is often provided to interagency groups, such as Community Early Childhood Councils, as well as TA providers, consultants, and trainers themselves. Second, there is a universal recognition that training alone does not work and additional support is needed to transfer the skills and knowledge learned in training to the work environment. This requires that an effort be made to ensure that the application of skills is supported. Training and TA should be jointly considered to make sure that the approach used to build skills and knowledge is based on and supports the application of specific skills needed by the recipients of these services.

Figure 1. Critical Components of Professional Development
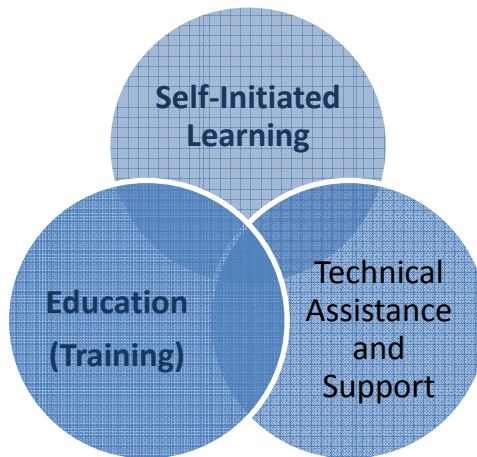
Recommendation 1

Include in the Early Childhood Professional Development Framework a definition of professional development and description of the major components of professional development that support the implementation of effective early care, intervention and education practices.

A definition of professional development adapted from the National Professional Development Center on Inclusion (2007) is proposed for Kentucky.

Professional development includes structured teaching and learning experiences to support the acquisition of knowledge and skills and the implementation of knowledge and skills in the work environment. Professional development is an ongoing process of continuous improvement that increases job-related knowledge and skills, and is intentional and purposeful to support specific outcomes related to practice.

The overall purpose of professional development is to support the professional growth and development of those working with young children and families. Therefore, the proposed definition recognizes three distinct but integrated components: 1) structured educational experiences, 2) structured technical assistance and support, and 3) self-guided learning (Figure 1). The focus of the recommendations in this paper are on the first two components, with an understanding that most professionals engage in self-guided learning through informal interactions with others in the field, reading professional journals/publications, etc.

Defining and delineating the critical components of professional development is the first step in helping the early care, intervention and education system identify key outcomes to be achieved. High quality professional development experiences should be designed to lead to:
  ♦ all early care, intervention, and education staff being competent, confident, highly qualified and able to implement practices consistently and with a high degree of fidelity;
  ♦ consistency in the use of high quality practices and programming across the state;

- continuous quality improvement, with staff who are able to manage change and effectively use available resources;
- high quality services to children and families; and
- measurable improvements in outcomes for children.

To help reach these outcomes, it will be important that opportunities exist for all staff to access professional development, including ancillary staff who may work with children and families (e.g., teacher aides/paraprofessionals, bus/van drivers, kitchen staff, therapists, directors, family service workers). It also will be important to ensure that those providing professional development opportunities use a wide variety of strategies and techniques that match the learner's needs.

Recommendation 2

Include in the Early Childhood Professional Development Framework a definition of training and a description of the key characteristics of training that is designed to support the implementation of effective early care, intervention and education practices.

One of the major components of a professional development system is the acquisition of knowledge through education. There are a number of approaches that can be used to support education. These include (but may not be limited to):

- Training sessions offered at workshops, conferences, institutes
- Formal coursework
- Independent studies
- Distance education, such as webinars, online modules, conference calls, web-based courses/modules, web-based meetings, etc.
- Study groups
- Communities of practice/learning; networking

The current Kentucky Early Childhood Professional Development Framework provides specific recommendations on how education, training and credentials can be structured to support high quality practices across the early care, intervention and education system. This recommendation includes the addition of a definition of training and education. The proposed definition of education and training is:

> **Structured learning experiences designed to help the learner gain knowledge and/or skills that will increase the implementation of high quality practices.**

A key characteristic of training and education within a professional development framework is that it typically involves learning experiences in contrived settings. During training, participants are often offered opportunities to practice skills through activities such as role playing, simulations, case studies and scenarios, critiquing videos, etc.

Effective training leads to a change in behavior that can be applied immediately in the work place (Rous, Patton & McLaren, 2002; Tong & Rathbun, 1997; Goad, 1982; Ittner & Douds, 1997). High quality training is delivered by a trainer who has thorough content knowledge and understands the needs of adult learners. Quality training is:

- Based on needs assessment of what potential participants value and need to improve services;
- Matched to the learner's previous knowledge base and experience;
- Culturally sensitive;
- Focused on achievement - based outcomes or what participants expect to happen as a result of the training; and
- Involves the use of evidence-based practice and recommended standards in both content and approach.

Recommendation 3

Add a section to the Early Childhood Professional Development Framework that defines technical assistance and provides a description of key characteristics of technical assistance and support that lead to the implementation of effective early care, intervention and education practices in the work environment.

A second key component of a professional development system is the provision of support services or technical assistance to help staff implement and sustain skills and practices in the work environment. The proposed definition of technical assistance is:

A collaborative, relationship-based model of assistance and support designed to:
- **identify, select, or design evidence-based solutions to address problems, needs, or goals,**
- **adopt or adapt knowledge to practice, and**
- **effectively implement solutions customized to meet the needs of the client.**

The provision of TA and support requires collaborative relationships. At a minimum, collaboration is required between the TA provider and the TA recipient. In addition, there may be times when collaboration between agencies that provide TA is required to adequately and effectively meet the TA recipient's needs. Such collaborative relationships are encouraged and must be thought about ahead of time to ensure that respect, confidentiality, and mutually agreed upon goals are all part of the collaborative relationship.

There are a number of approaches that can be used for providing technical assistance and support. These include (but may not be limited to) the following.

- Sharing information and resources
- Modeling
- Mentoring
- Coaching
- Structured Consultation
- Communities of Practice/Learners
- Internships

There are a variety of delivery methods that can be used to provide TA. These consist of both off-site and on-site methods and include (but may not be limited to) the following.

- Telephone
- E-mail
- Discussion Boards
- Fax
- Video-Conferencing
- Program Visits

There are several key characteristics of technical assistance and support. First, the TA recipient must have a base of knowledge related to the practice for the support in implementing the practice or skill to be effective. Second, this level of professional development involves the demonstration of knowledge and skills in a natural work setting or being able to produce what was learned. For example, support may involve demonstration of a skill by a technical assistance specialist, with the TA recipient then being able to reproduce that skill.

Proposed TA Provider Competencies/Skills

Similar to trainers, those providing technical assistance and support need specific skills in order to implement TA effectively. The skills and competencies can be organized into three major areas.

Establishing and Maintaining a Relationship with the Client

1) Build supportive, positive, and trusting relationships with clients/staff/programs.
2) Recognize the client as an integral participant/partner in identifying needs and developing an action plan to address those needs.

Content Knowledge

1) Maintain knowledge of trends and most current research and evidence-based practices in area of expertise.
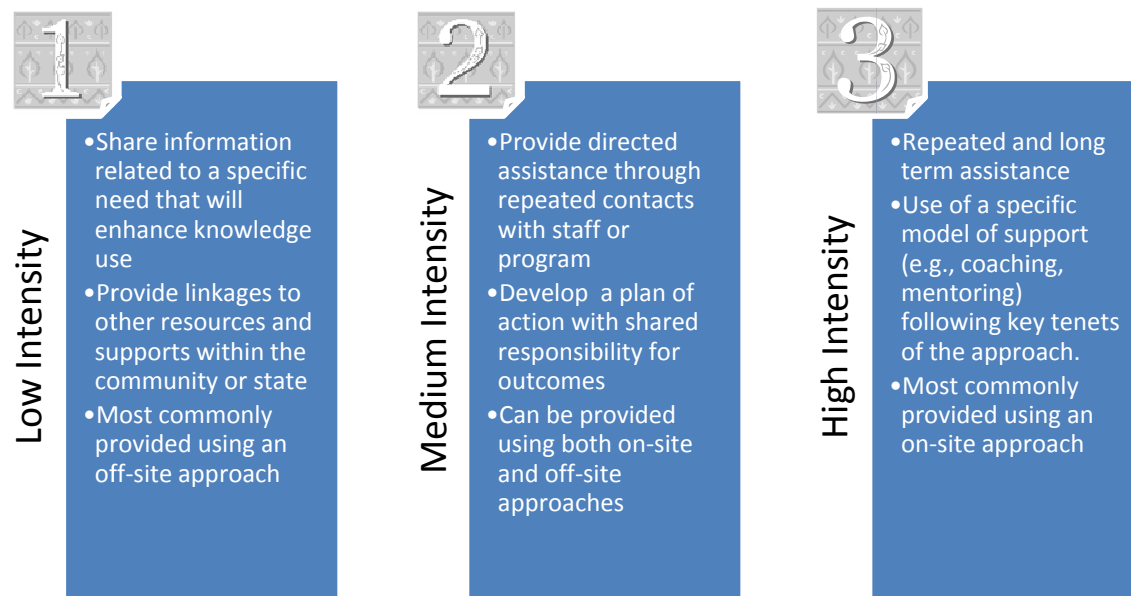2) Apply evidence based knowledge and skills, based on the specific needs of the TA recipient.

Implement Effective Technical Assistance Practices

1) Utilize and demonstrate expertise in applying evidence based technical assistance practices applicable to client needs.
2) Maintain confidentiality throughout the TA process.
3) Demonstrate flexibility and a positive attitude in delivering assistance to meet the challenges and changing needs of the client.
4) Use observation strategies and appropriate tools to objectively observe client/program to determine prescriptive changes needed.
5) Document TA activities and outcomes.
6) Develop and embed new knowledge and skills to build staff/program capacity.
7) Provide services and follow-up in a timely and efficient manner.

Continuum of TA services: Matching Level to Need and Desired Outcome

TA activities should be conducted, recorded, and reported consistently. In addition, it is important that the intensity of the TA provided be matched to the level of need and the outcomes that have been identified by the TA recipient. Therefore, the level and intensity of TA may vary from low (brief encounters) to high (intense on-site support over time), with the intent to provide support to staff in effectively implementing a practice or set of practices (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Levels and Intensity of Technical Assistance

Low Intensity

1

- Share information related to a specific need that will enhance knowledge use
- Provide linkages to other resources and supports within the community or state
- Most commonly provided using an off-site approach

Medium Intensity

2

- Provide directed assistance through repeated contacts with staff or program
- Develop a plan of action with shared responsibility for outcomes
- Can be provided using both on-site and off-site approaches

High Intensity

3

- Repeated and long term assistance
- Use of a specific model of support (e.g., coaching, mentoring) following key tenets of the approach.
- Most commonly provided using an on-site approach

When providing support, it is important to remember that TA should be aligned with education and/or training to support the transfer of knowledge and/or skills into the work environment. This means that further areas for education and training may be identified as part of the TA process.

Measuring and Evaluating the Impact of Technical Assistance and Support

Just as it is important to evaluate the effectiveness of training, it is also critical to evaluate technical assistance. By developing a plan to measure the impact and effectiveness of the TA and support provided and implementing that plan, the TA provider will obtain valuable information to direct future efforts. There are three key components of this evaluation process that need to be addressed.

Critical Levels of Evaluation

Similar to the levels of evaluation outlined in the Fundamentals of Effective Training (FET) curriculum for credentialed trainers (Rous, et al., 2002), the same four levels (Gusky, 2002; Kirkpatrick, 2000; Milano, Michael, & Ullius, 1998) are important to consider when designing TA evaluation.

1. Obtaining the **TA recipient's reactions** to the TA and support involves allowing the TA recipient to evaluate TA immediately following receipt of assistance. Determining the information desired and developing a written comment sheet that can be submitted anonymously allows the TA recipient to provide honest reactions to the assistance received.
2. Evaluating the **TA recipient's learning** may mean conducting a before and after measurement of knowledge and/or skills identified as needing improvement.
3. Measuring the **TA recipient's change in behavior** involves determining if the desired skill has been implemented and maintained over time. A follow-up appraisal may be required at some agreed

upon time in the future to determine if the TA recipient is continuing to utilize the new knowledge and/or skill.

4. Determining the **results** of the TA and support identifies the impact that the acquisition of new knowledge and/or skills has on both the quality of the early care, intervention and education environment and ultimately on children and/or families served. For instance, improvement in utilization of proper diapering techniques may result in decreased instances of gastrointestinal illnesses in a classroom.

TA Provider Self-Reflection

Self-reflection on the part of the TA provider is important for continuous quality improvement. Considering the relationship with the TA recipient and how this relationship impacted his/her receptiveness to support, the opportunities available to practice new skills, and future opportunities and approaches that may be helpful are all important aspects of reflection. Additionally, it is important to include in the evaluation plan some concept of how information obtained from evaluation methods will be utilized to improve the provision of TA and support.

Link to the TA Recipient's Goals and Outcomes

As discussed previously, the TA provider and recipient should establish specific client goals and outcomes for the TA provision. Therefore, mechanisms should be put into place collaboratively between the TA provider and recipient to formally measure the degree to which the assistance and support aided in meeting those identified goals and outcomes.

Recommendations for Dissemination

Expanding the Kentucky Early Childhood Professional Development Framework to include technical assistance services requires the commitment of all agencies that provide professional development opportunities to early care and education practitioners. To ensure that the goal of high quality practices is attained, the dissemination of this information should be based on a common process. Responding to the diverse needs of all agencies requires that dissemination materials be developed to meet all needs. Dissemination materials will include common presentation information that can be distributed in multiple formats including face-to-face and web-based delivery. Each participating agency will be responsible for ensuring that professionals are made aware of these changes in the PD framework and develop agency plans to implement these changes in their training practices.

The implementation of the recommendations included in this report can and should happen at different levels. To ensure implementation, the committee provides the following recommendations related to the level at which specific components should be addressed.

State Level

- Development and Implementation of an overall plan for dissemination of the PD Framework, including new components.

- Defining specific terms related to technical assistance and support activities (e.g., mentoring, coaching)

Regional TA System or Network Level (e.g., RTC, CCR& R):
- Development of a plan to measure the impact and effectiveness of TA services and supports.
- Identify specific qualifications of TA providers within agency TA networks or systems
- Identification of evidence based practice and standards to support TA activities
- Defining levels of intensity/duration of TA and establishing outcomes for TA
- Identification of processes and procedures for recording and reporting TA activities.

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Work Group Process

The TA work group includes a diverse number of early childhood professionals representing training and technical assistance providers across child care, First Steps, HANDS, Healthy Start, Head Start, public school preschool, universities. The first draft of the recommendations was developed in December 2007. The recommendations were reviewed and refined using the following process and schedule.

December 2007

♦   Work group meetings (December 7 and 12) to development recommendations.

January - February 2008

♦   Writing team developed draft report and sent to full work group for input.

♦   Dissemination of revised report to work group and others within their respective agencies for review and input.

♦   Full work group review of suggestions from agency reviews

March 2008

♦   Development of dissemination plan

♦   Final report developed

April

♦   Presentation of recommendations to EC Authority (April 25, 2008)